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George bill addresses Pfizer complaint

LANSING - Legislation introduced by Sen. Tom George and a colleague designed to improve Michigan's Medicaid drug policies was reported out of the Senate Committee on Health Policy this week.

Among other things, the legislation would allow for the establishment of disease management pilot projects and expand the Medicaid formulary to include more medications for the treatment of mental illnesses.

"When Pfizer reduced their Kalamazoo workforce, they cited the state's lack of disease management programs. My legislation allows the Department of Community Health to work with pharmaceutical companies to establish such programs," said George, R-Texas Twp.

Senate Bill 831, sponsored by George, would help insure that the best medications are being considered for the list of preferred drugs from which doctors are allowed to prescribe for Medicaid patients. It would help alleviate the current struggle doctors and patients go through trying to get Medicaid approval for non-listed medications.

Senate Bill, 832 a companion bill introduced by Sen. Beverly Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, expands on the initiative by creating an exemption from the prior authorization process for certain drugs used to treat mental illness, AIDS, cancer, and hepatitis C.

There is broad support for the bills in the Medicaid community, according to Mark Reinstein, president and CEO of the Mental Health Association in Michigan. Reinstein said his organization "appreciates that Senators George and Hammerstrom have reached out to mental health stakeholders in an effort to create the best legislative package possible."

"The latest bill drafts incorporate a number of suggestions to make sure there is attentiveness to consumer rights issues, and we commend them for this action," Reinstein said.

The bills now go to the full Senate for consideration.

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